

BRITISH WEST INDIES.

MESSAGE

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

TRANSMITTING

Information relative to the proposed employment, in the British West Indian colonies, of free blacks from the United States.

JANUARY 13, 1852.

Referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and ordered to be printed.

To the House of Representatives:

In answer to the resolution of the House of Representatives, of the 5th instant, I herewith transmit to it a report and accompanying papers from the Secretary of State.

MILLARD FILLMORE.

WASHINGTON, January 12, 1852.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, January 10, 1852.

The Secretary of State, to whom has been referred the resolution which was adopted by the House of Representatives of the United States on the 5th instant, requesting the President to communicate to that house, if not incompatible with the public interest, any information he may possess, respecting a circular which was issued by the Secretary of State for the British colonial department, on the 16th of October, 1850, relative to the employment, in her Britannic Majesty's West India colonies, of free blacks and liberated slaves from the United States; "and particularly what action the legislative assemblies of the British West Indian islands have taken in pursuance of the suggestions contained" in said circular, has the honor to report to the President the accompanying copy of papers, which embrace all the information possessed by this Department on the subject of the said resolution.

Respectfully submitted,

DANL. WEBSTER.

To the PRESIDENT of the United States.

Hamilton, Print.

[No. 148.]

Mr. Lawrence to Mr. Webster.

LEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES,
London, November 14, 1851.

SIR :—A few weeks since George W. Owens, Esq., of Georgia, called upon me to say that he had seen a newspaper published in the island of Antigua, containing a circular despatch from the colonial office, recommending the British West India colonies to enter into contracts with persons held in slavery in the United States. Soon after the interview, he furnished me with a copy of the despatch.

Mr. Owens seemed greatly annoyed at Lord Grey's despatch, although I told him that this Government could not have the intention of meddling with slavery in the United States. He, however, was anxious for an explanation from the Government. I did not feel authorized, nor did I think it wise to make an official matter of the subject, as I believed I could accomplish the object in a more satisfactory manner by a personal interview. I accordingly called on Lord Palmerston, in the absence of Lord Grey, and received from him a verbal explanation, disclaiming any such purpose as Mr. Owens had drawn from the language of the despatch. On Lord Grey's return to town, I received from him an informal note to the same effect. I immediately wrote Mr. Owens a note embodying the substance of these explanations, and received from him a reply, dated at Liverpool, expressing dissatisfaction with them. Not knowing what use he may make in the United States of the circular despatch, I deem it my duty to place you in possession of a copy of my letter to him. I have read this letter to Lord Palmerston, and have received from him an assurance that it is entirely in accordance with his own views, with the views of Lord Grey, and with those of the Cabinet ministers.

The despatch in question was, as you will see, sent to the West Indies some time in the autumn of 1850, and as it has never been heard of in the United States, I apprehend it was never acted upon by the Colonial Legislatures. It grew out of the action of the late Mr. Turnbull, who was, I believe, of the mixed commission in Cuba, and an agent of this Government in matters connected with the slave trade. He was in Washington about two years since, and while there saw many persons of Maryland, Virginia, and other Southern States, respecting the free colored people of those States, and communicated the result of his observations to this Government.

I should not have thought it necessary to trouble you with this matter, if Mr. Owens had expressed himself satisfied with my letter.

I have the honor to be, sir, very respectfully your obd't servant,

ABBOTT LAWRENCE.

TO HON. DANIEL WEBSTER,

Secretary of State, Washington, D. C.

Extract from the Antigua Weekly Register, published in the city of St. Johns, 26th November, 1850.

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY,
Thursday, November 21, 1850.

When the House was formed, which was not before two o'clock, Mr. Speaker informed the House that he had received a message from the Governor-in-chief, which he read, as follows :

R. J. McIntosh, the Governor-in-chief, transmits, for the information of the House of Assembly, the accompanying copy of a circular despatch which he has received from her Majesty's Secretary of State, suggesting measures to be adopted for the encouragement of emigration to the West Indies, from the United States.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE, *Antigua, November 18, 1850.*

[Circular.]

DOWNING STREET,

October 16, 1850.

I have to acquaint you that it has been suggested to me that a desirable class of emigrants for the West Indian colonies might be induced to come to them from among the black and colored population of the United States, whose arrival and location, if they choose to come, would, I have no doubt, be advantageous both to themselves and the colonies. I am not aware of anything which can be done by the colonial governments to encourage such immigration, beyond showing a readiness to pass acts giving the privilege of naturalization to any such persons as might come and settle there, and providing that a bounty should be payable on such immigrants under such arrangements as may be thought desirable.

I could also suggest, as deserving of consideration, whether laws might not be passed, rendering binding, on certain conditions, engagements to pay sums of money which may have been agreed on by immigrants, although such engagements may have been contracted in America, and while the parties were in a state of slavery.

I have, &c.,

GREY.

Mr. Lawrence to Mr. Owens.

LONDON, *November 8, 1851.*

MY DEAR SIR:—I have just received a reply to my note to Lord Palmerston, accompanied by Lord Grey's explanation of the despatch to which I called his attention. I am assured that he never intended to sanction or suggest entering into any arrangements with regard to slaves not first known to and approved by the masters—and that so far from supposing that any American would or could complain of the proposed arrangements, it was believed the slaveholders would receive it with satisfaction and join in carrying it into effect.

It appears that Lord Grey has been aware for some time that the West India colonies, are suffering for the want of an adequate supply of labor. A gentleman from these colonies directed his attention to the fact that there were in some of the slaveholding States, a large number of free blacks whom the whites would be glad to have removed, and who would meet to a certain extent the wants of the colonies. Knowing it to be the policy of the slave States to rid themselves of such a population, he thought a measure contemplating such a result would be favorably received by them.

He was farther led to suppose, on the authority of certain American gentle-

man communicated to him through the same channel, that many slaveholders would avail themselves of such an opportunity to emancipate their slaves, if they could be assured of their being removed from the country. He was informed that the laws forbade emancipation, unless the liberated slaves were also removed, and that the expense of this prevented persons who would otherwise emancipate their slaves from doing so. But it was said a measure would be acceptable which would enable such persons to remove their slaves from the country when liberated, without expense to themselves.

With this view he prepared a plan, which should aim at the employment in the West India colonies of free blacks from the United States—and should also offer to the planters the prospect, not only of a removal of their liberated slaves without expense, but of a recovery of a portion of their value also. He recommended this plan to the colonies, and wrote the circular in question, in the belief that the want of labor would be supplied from these two sources, with the assent and co-operation of the slaveholders and the governments of the slaveholding States.

It is to be regretted that with such an end in view language should have been employed capable of a different construction—but this explanation appears to deprive it of its objectionable character.

With great consideration I remain, dear sir, very faithfully yours,

ABBOTT LAWRENCE.

HON. DANIEL WEBSTER,

Secretary of State, Washington, D. C.